

LEAVES AND FLOWERS FROM NATURE.

PLATE XCVIII.

Plans and Elevations of Flowers.

- |                |                   |                             |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Isis.       | 7. Mouse-ear.     | 13. Glossocomia clematidea. |
| 2. White Lily. | 8. Honeysuckle.   | 14. Convolvulus.            |
| 3. Daffodil.   | 9. Mallow.        | 15. Primrose.               |
| 4. Narcissus.  | 10. Ladies'smock. | 16. Periwinkle.             |
| 5. Onion.      | 11. Speedwell.    | 17. Clarkia.                |
| 6. Dog-Rose.   | 12. Harebell.     | 18. Leycesteria formosa.    |

PLATE XCIX.

1. Honeysuckle. 2. Convolvulus. Full size.

PLATE C.

- Passion Flowers. Full size.

LEAVES AND FLOWERS FROM NATURE.

We have endeavoured to show in the preceding chapters, that in the best periods of art, all ornament was rather based upon an observation of the principles which regulate the arrangement of form in nature, than on an attempt to imitate the absolute forms of those works; and that whenever this limit was exceeded in any art, it was one of the strongest symptoms of decline: true art consisting in idealizing, and not copying, the forms of nature.

We think it desirable to insist rather strongly on this point, as in the present uncertain state in which we are, there seems a general disposition arising to reproduce, as faithfully as may be possible, natural form as works of ornament. The world has become weary of the eternal repetition of the same conventional forms which have been borrowed from styles which have passed away, and therefore can excite in us but little sympathy. There has risen, we say, a universal cry of "Go back to nature, as the ancients did;" we should be amongst the first to echo that cry, but it will depend much on what we go to seek, how far we may succeed. If we go to Nature as the Egyptians and the Greeks went, we may hope; but if we go there like the Chinese, or even as the Gothic artists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we should gain but little. We have already, in the floral carpets, floral papers, and floral carvings of the present day, sufficient evidence to show that no art can be produced by such means; and that the more closely nature is copied, the farther we are removed from producing a work of art.

Although ornament is most properly only an accessory to architecture, and should never be allowed to usurp the place of structural features, or to overload or to disguise them, it is in all cases the very soul of an architectural monument.

LEAVES AND FLOWERS FROM NATURE.

By the ornament of a building, we can judge more truly of the creative power which the artist has brought to bear upon the work. The general proportions of the building may be good, the mouldings may be more or less accurately copied from the most approved models; but the very instant that ornament is attempted, we see how far the architect is at the same time the artist. It is the best measure of the care and refinement bestowed upon the work. To put ornament in the right place is not easy; to render that ornament at the same time a superadded beauty and an expression of the intention of the whole work, is still more difficult.

Unfortunately it has been too much the practice in our time to abandon to hands most unfitted for the task the adornment of the structural features of buildings, and more especially their interior decorations.

The fatal facility of manufacturing ornament which the revived use of the acanthus leaf has given, has tended very much to this result, and deadened the creative instinct in artists' minds. What could so readily be done by another, they have left that other to do; and so far have abdicated their high position of the architect, the head and chief.

How, then, is this universal desire for progress to be satisfied—how is any new style of ornament to be invented or developed? Some will probably say, A new style of architecture must first be found, and we should be beginning at the wrong end to commence with ornament.

We do not think so. We have already shown that the desire for works of ornament is co-existent with the earliest attempts of civilisation of every people; and that architecture adopts ornament, does not create it.

The Corinthian order of architecture is said to have been suggested by an acanthus leaf found growing round an earthen pot; but the acanthus leaf existed as an ornament long before, or, at all events, the principle of its growth was observed in the conventional ornaments. It was the peculiar application of this leaf to the formation of the capital of a column which was the sudden invention that created the Corinthian order.

The principle of the foliation, and even the general form of the leaves, which predominate in the architecture of the thirteenth century, existed long before in the illuminated MSS.; and derived as they were, most probably, from the East, have given an almost Eastern character to Early English ornament. The architects of the thirteenth century were, therefore, very familiar with this system of ornamentation; and we cannot doubt, that one cause of the adoption so universally of this style during the thirteenth century arose from the great familiarity with its leading forms which already existed.

The floral style, in direct imitation of nature, which succeeded, was also preceded by the same style in works of ornament. The facility of painting flowers in direct imitation of nature in the pages of a missal, induced an attempt to rival them in stone in the buildings of the time.

The architectural ornament of the Elizabethan period is mostly a reproduction of the works of the loom, the painter, and the engraver. In any borrowed style, more especially, this would be so. The artists in the Elizabethan period were necessarily much more familiar with the paintings, hangings, furniture, metal-work, and other articles of luxury, which England received from the Continent, than they would be with the architectural monuments; and it is this familiarity with the ornamentation of the period, but imperfect knowledge of the architecture, which led to the development of those peculiarities which distinguish Elizabethan architecture from the purer architecture of the Revival.

We therefore think we are justified in the belief, that a new style of ornament may be produced independently of a new style of architecture; and, moreover, that it would be one of the readiest means of arriving at a new style; for instance, if we could only arrive at the invention of a new termination to a means of support, one of the most difficult points would be accomplished.